

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Accessible transport: legal obligations](#), HC 82

Wednesday 22 November 2023

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Iain Stewart (Chair); Jack Brereton; Sara Britcliffe; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith; Mick Whitley.

Questions 47–78

Witnesses

[II](#): Anna Bowles, Head of Consumer Policy and Enforcement, Civil Aviation Authority; Rob Griggs, Policy and Public Affairs Director, Airlines UK; and Karen Dee, Chief Executive Officer, Airports Operators Association.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Airport Operators Association](#)
- [CAA Consumer Panel](#)
- [Airlines UK](#)
- [Civil Aviation Authority](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Anna Bowles, Rob Griggs and Karen Dee.

Q47 **Chair:** Welcome to our second panel where we will consider aviation in our inquiry. For the purposes of our records, could I ask each of you to state your name and organisation?

Karen Dee: Good morning, everyone. I am Karen Dee, the chief executive of the Airport Operators Association. We are the trade association for UK airports.

Rob Griggs: Good morning, everyone. I am Rob Griggs. I am the director of policy and public affairs at Airlines UK, the trade association for UK-registered airlines.

Anna Bowles: Good morning, everyone. My name is Anna Bowles. I am the head of consumer policy and enforcement at the Civil Aviation Authority.

Q48 **Chair:** Thank you all for your time this morning. Rob and Karen, according to recent CAA figures, around 60% of people with a disability have experienced difficulties in accessing airports and planes. Could you, first, talk me through who is responsible at what point in a passenger's journey through the airport and on to the craft?

Karen Dee: We are responsible for that journey once the passenger arrives at the airport. Quite often that is provided through third-party services that contract with the airport. It is our responsibility to ensure the service through security to the gate and then up to and including the point of boarding the aircraft, at which point we hand over to the airline.

Rob Griggs: Conversely, when passengers leave the aircraft, that will be the airport's responsibility as well. Airlines play a really important role, particularly with pre-notification. An absolutely key part for the whole system to work properly is ensuring that the airlines communicate any special assistance needs to the airports in a timely way. Through our processes, airlines make sure that we are getting assistance information at the time of booking or thereafter. That will then be transmitted through to the airports, usually around 36 hours before travel.

Karen Dee: Could I add one further point that I didn't mention? The loading of equipment is, of course, the responsibility of the ground handlers, who typically contract with airlines. If there is wheelchair equipment, that service is provided by the ground handlers outbound and inbound.

Q49 **Chair:** To clarify, if someone has a wheelchair or other bit of equipment, do the airports have any responsibility for that, or is it entirely, indirectly, for the airlines?



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Karen Dee: It depends on the point when the person is required to use it. We provide alternative wheelchairs or mobility assistance. At the point at which the passenger is transferred to alternative arrangements, those go to the ground handlers. Sometimes, that is as late as actual boarding. Some equipment can be taken up with the passenger. They can use their own up until the point of getting on to the plane. It depends on the type of equipment.

Rob Griggs: It is really important that the airline's role is to make sure that any mobility equipment or wheelchairs are transported safely, obviously within the aircraft or on board, and get to the destination appropriately. The in-flight process to make sure that is done properly would be our responsibility too.

Q50 **Chair:** Given that approximately three in five experience problems, where are the weak points in the system that you have just described? Why does it go wrong for so many people?

Karen Dee: Aviation is complex. There are lots of places, depending on the individual person's needs, where things can go wrong. We all recognise that sometimes there is a problem with pre-notification. The more information we have about an individual's needs beforehand, the better we are able to plan for them. But things sometimes go wrong.

Sometimes, that is with the staff in the services. There is a training requirement that is being addressed. Sometimes, we do not have all the information that we need, so the equipment turns out to be not quite what we were expecting or the passenger is not aware of some of the restrictions that might apply. There are certain things that are not easily carried aboard an aircraft. Batteries have to be treated in a special way for safety purposes. There are lots of areas that we want to address. Part of that is making sure that passengers are given as much information as possible about what they need to tell us, and therefore what we then can deliver for them. Information in advance is crucial. The industry recognises that there is more for us to do, but there are various touch points where things can go wrong in a complex environment. We are working hard to make sure that we reduce those.

Q51 **Chair:** Rob, what is your perspective?

Rob Griggs: I agree with Karen. The number of those experiencing difficulties is obviously too high. Looking at the same survey data, it is good that those who have travelled recently had a better experience. That is not to say that it is a perfect experience or that there is not a lot more to do, but it feels like there is a generally improving picture and greater awareness of the needs. Systems are being put in place. There is definitely more to do, and that number is too high, but it is safe to say that there is progress. It is certainly something that airlines take incredibly seriously. There is a huge amount of work going on.



As Karen said, pre-notification is hugely important. Where you can have issues is, for example, if it is an airline coming in from overseas where those rates were lower. You may then have a spike in demand in the airport that can have knock-on effects for the ability of the airport service providers to meet the needs of other aircraft coming in. Always within aviation, which is a complex ecosystem, there are weather delays or other things that can compound that. We say that not by way of excuse but more to flag up that it is complicated. Of course, we need to make sure as a sector that we put in place sufficient resilience to meet those kinds of situations when they occur.

My final point is that there is, generally, a huge amount of increasing demand. There were something like 3.5 million pre-notifications for assistance over the last reported year period. My understanding is that that does not include those who arrive at the airport not having pre-notified, which can still be a considerable number. Of course, there are lots of reasons why someone may not pre-notify. They may be booking at the last minute; or they may realise on arrival at an airport that they need assistance when they thought they might not. There are lots of reasons for that. Next summer, with passenger numbers coming back up to where they were pre-pandemic and even beyond, there is probably going to be a greater percentage of people seeking assistance than there have been historically. It is going to be really important that not just airlines but the whole system recognises that long in advance to make sure that the resources are there.

Q52 Chair: As you said, travelling by air can be a complex process. There are all sorts of issues that can occur, and disruption happens. It can be stressful for even seasoned travellers, but someone with a disability can end up feeling very distressed if they are not being handled properly. They will not really care whether it is the airline or the airport. Is there more to be done on having a single point of reference at airports to assist people with disabilities when there is disruption? Is that something you are looking at?

Karen Dee: Better co-ordination is always something that the sector wants to deliver. At each airport they take a role and they have a forum with the airlines they operate with. I think you are absolutely right: the passenger does not care who is responsible for what part of the journey. What they want is for it all to work. We recognise that. There are forums that meet regularly at each of the airports. Some of them are slightly different. They are therefore looking at incidents as well. With any complaints, but also where we see that things are going wrong, we can use CCTV. The forums then allow for that to be investigated. Certainly, the airport PRM system, the service there, should take a lead to ensure that it is co-ordinating and trying to help where it can.

Q53 Chair: Rob?

Rob Griggs: It is absolutely recognised that if you are travelling, as you say, you don't care which part of the system is responsible for what. You



primarily have a relationship with the airline with which you bought your ticket. I know that the airlines work closely with the airport and airport colleagues in handling issues or complaints if they come through.

One example of recent good practice is that we as airlines, with airports and others, work with DfT to publish what is now called the air passenger travel guide. It was the air passenger charter. That quite neatly sums up what expectations are throughout the journey for all passengers, but also for disabled passengers and those with additional needs. There is what you should do, who you can talk to and how you can complain, if you need to. That is by no means a silver bullet, but steps have been taken to try to make sure that the information is out there for those who need it.

Q54 Chair: Anna, can you reflect on what you have just heard? It was the CAA figures which said that nearly 60% of people have difficulties. Are things getting better or worse, or is there not much change?

Anna Bowles: It may be helpful if I set out our role and how we enforce the legislation. The CAA is the body responsible for the enforcement of passenger rights legislation in the UK. We do that under the banner of our access to air work. A key part is a framework that we refer to as the airport framework, which we introduced in 2014. That sets out a set of standardised requirements at airports in order to allow us to compare how different airports are performing in the provision of accessibility services. It primarily focuses on the timeliness of the provision of service, but it also looks at the quality of service. We get that information from surveys of the individuals who receive the assistance.

We published the first annual report relating to that. We gather the information on a monthly or quarterly basis, but every year we publish an annual report. That scores the airports and sets out how they each perform. They can be very good, good, needs improvement or poor. What we have seen over time is that no airport likes to be bottom of the pile. No airport wants to be considered poor. In the years that we have been undertaking that work, airports have improved and have invested significantly in the services that people receive. We believe that everybody should have access to travel by air, whatever their disability and whether it is visible or non-visible. Some of the investment that we see at airports is also about non-visible disabilities. It is making sure that everybody has the confidence to travel.

Due to the success of that framework, we propose introducing a similar framework for airlines. We consulted on that relatively recently. The consultation closed in June. We hope that it will drive similar sorts of improvements. I absolutely agree that passengers do not care who is responsible for the provision of their service. They just want to get from A to B like everyone else and have a stress-free journey. It is improving. It is clearly still challenging and there is more that needs to be done.

Q55 Jack Brereton: When it comes to things like safety, obviously the airline industry has a very good record, but, as we have heard, on accessibility



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issues it is the reverse. Do you think that this should be treated more as a health and safety issue? Would that result in more focus and attention on improving things like disability access?

Anna Bowles: I don't think that it is seen as the reverse. There are lots of very high-profile cases of things that have gone wrong that clearly should not have gone wrong. Of the 3.4 million passengers who requested assistance last year, 88% were people who requested assistance for travelling through the airport—people who cannot walk long distances and cannot walk up and down stairs. On the whole, their request for assistance stops once they get on the plane, and they are okay to deal with their needs on the plane themselves. Six per cent. of people are wheelchair users and 6% are blind, deaf or have some other non-visible disability. Those more complex needs tend to be where things become more of a challenge, particularly as you get on the aircraft. There can be more inconsistency in the service that is provided. I think that is where the focus on improvements needs to be.

Q56 **Jack Brereton:** Is enough prioritisation being given to these issues by airlines and airports?

Anna Bowles: I think it is taken seriously by both airlines and airports. As I said, no airport wants to be rated as the worst airport or poor. It is quite high profile when our annual report comes out. They take it seriously, but that is one of the reasons why we are looking to put in place a similar sort of framework for airlines, where we can identify both how airlines are performing against quite a complex journey and consistency in meeting the obligations across all the elements where airlines are required to provide support.

Q57 **Jack Brereton:** Rob and Karen, obviously significant disruption was caused as a result of the pandemic. A lot of staff were made redundant which meant that when numbers came back, and when people returned to flying, there was not necessarily the support that there had been. Are we now back to a state whereby passenger assistance support is at the standard that it was before the pandemic?

Karen Dee: You are absolutely right; 2022 was a very particular problem. Resilience across the airports, not just for disabled passengers but for all passengers, was very challenging. Confidence is much improved. We have seen services much improved during 2023, partly through very significant investments and recruitment; for example, at Heathrow their service provider has added another 600 people to the service since last summer. For 2024, the airports are continuing to invest in not just staff but equipment. Rob touched on this. Most airports are seeing something like a 20% to 30% increase in passengers requiring needs, based on 2019, even though our overall passenger levels are still below pre-pandemic.

That is a good news story because it means that more passengers are travelling, but it has meant that airports have had to make those



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investments. We are now pretty confident that we are in a much better place; 2023 was much better than 2022.

Q58 **Jack Brereton:** Are those resources at the level that they need to be, or is there still further to go to get them to where they should be?

Karen Dee: Airports keep those levels under review. They are partly driven by the CAA annual report. I would say that, from an airport perspective, that is a good example of how the regulatory reporting system drives the behaviours that we want to see. We are seeing those investments. It is taken very seriously, and it is under constant review. Most of the airports believe they are in a good place. You are always trying to anticipate where demand will go. For example, Luton has re-tendered its PRM service at least twice since the pandemic because it is seeing those increased levels. Airports react when they can see that there is demand.

Training was an issue, but again once the recruitment was in place staff were trained and are catching up. That is driving a feeling of confidence going forward, but it is always kept under review so that we can continue to make the improvements that we see.

Q59 **Jack Brereton:** Rob, is there anything that you want to add in terms of how things recovered? Are airlines satisfied with how things have recovered in that respect?

Rob Griggs: Yes. I will not cover again too much of what Karen said. Last year, spring and early summer were really challenging, not just for accessibility provision but for the whole system. Hopefully, that was a one-off, very specific, circumstance. This year, notwithstanding issues that were not within the airport/airline purview, there was a good summer. We have had a strong summer and, in many cases, while overall levels of demand might be equivalent to or around 2019's, often the spikes have been greater at certain times.

The system has held up pretty well overall. There is confidence that the staffing is there across the sector, including in airports and service providers. I think, though, that what airlines are mindful of, and we will be talking to airport colleagues about, as Karen said, are the sometimes double digit increases in the relative number of those seeking assistance. That is a good thing, but there is a lead time to making sure that there are staff in place, particularly for next summer. The next stage on from that is that, even if you have the people in place, they need a little bit of time to train and get up to the standards of where you would be after a few years' experience. It is then making sure that those people are deployed where they need to be at the time aircraft are arriving, which is where we come full circle to pre-notification and other things we can do to make sure that the resource is being deployed. Having it is great, but it needs to be used properly.



Karen Dee: On the pre-notification point, to give you a sense of things, with very good airlines you can see 80% pre-notification, but some experience at Heathrow last year, for example, is that it was as low as 60%. That means that, on average, there were about 1,500 passengers per day requiring assistance that had not been pre-notified. Those are quite large numbers of passengers and unpredicted services that will need to be provided. Clearly, the better we can get with pre-notification, the better able we are to deal with that.

Q60 **Jack Brereton:** Is anything being done through both airlines and airports to try to encourage passengers who need assistance to book it?

Karen Dee: Clearly, it is about providing passengers with the information and asking not just airlines but travel agents. People book to fly in lots of different ways. There is a challenge for us as a sector to make sure that we get that information, and ask passengers and make them aware of the sort of information that we would like from them. The more that we can do that, the better. Of course, as Rob said, some of that assistance is inbound. There may be people travelling from other countries where they have not been asked those questions. We have to deal with that. We strive as airports to provide the service to those who have not pre-notified, but it has a knock-on impact.

Chair: Before I turn to Gavin, Sara has a quick supplementary.

Q61 **Sara Britcliffe:** Thank you, Chair. This is slightly off topic. Anna, you rightly said that we want to have everybody travelling by air. One of my concerns is people with allergies. They have concerns that there is not an overarching framework for airlines when it comes to serving food in flight. Airlines are left to decide their own individual policies, which can lead to confusion. I have experienced that with one of my own constituents.

On being able to access air travel, what assessment, if any, has the industry made of the benefits of an overarching regulatory framework for airlines for passengers with allergies? Has there been any assessment of that? Right now, individual airlines can just decide what they want to do for people with allergies. It is very off topic.

Anna Bowles: It is off topic, and it is not an area that I am an expert on. I would expect it to be something that was considered by our cabin safety team. It is perhaps better if we respond to you after today in writing, if that is okay, about anything around that. I would not want to tell you the wrong information.

Rob Griggs: I am very happy to take it away and look at it in more detail. Ultimately, what airlines want is consistency and clarity in any guidance. Whatever the policy is, if there is to be one, just make sure that it is clear and that they can enforce it. In the world of more specific accessibility, assistance animals is an area where airlines report increasing challenges. There used to be a pretty clear definition of what constituted an assistance animal. There isn't now. It has been left to airlines to make decisions about what constitutes an animal that should



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be safely on board an aircraft, which does not really benefit anyone. It is something that is being worked on by the CAA and colleagues. It is an area where, ultimately, what airlines want is a policy they can communicate clearly to their customers, be that around allergies, assistance animals and so on.

Q62 Gavin Newlands: In preparing for this panel, I was having a look at the airport access reports. I was quite pleased to see that Glasgow is consistently one of the better performers or the most consistent performer for airports above a certain passenger level, which is heartening for the MP for Glasgow airport. Notwithstanding that, Anna, you have taken us through the CAA responsibilities, and I want to probe a little further on how you actually carry them out. Could you tell us how you ensure that the accessibility regulations, such as they are for both airports and airlines, are currently followed? How in practice do you work to ensure that they meet their obligations?

Anna Bowles: Obviously, we engage with airports and airlines on a regular basis. We also have a team of individuals who are responsible for those areas. We go out to airports on a really regular basis and observe the service that is being provided. Across September and October, which are peak months for the provision of accessibility services, we spent about 36 days in my team monitoring 10 different airports so that we could see for ourselves how well the airports were performing. It also enables us to check that the data they provide us with is a true reflection of what we see on the ground. We are looking at the timeliness of the provision of that service.

We get survey responses from consumers who have received the service themselves. As part of the framework, airports are required to have in place working groups, which disability organisations join to impart their lived experience and to make suggestions as to how things can improve. We attend those working groups so that we get to hear both sides of the story. We can then use the information that we glean from that to encourage further improvements.

Q63 Gavin Newlands: Since Brexit, the CAA has taken on a slew of new responsibilities and has obviously increased in size. Has there been any issue, with regard to capacity, in any of your proactive work in health and safety and in ensuring that airports and airlines meet their obligations?

Anna Bowles: We have a distinct team that looks at accessibility and passenger rights in general. The team has grown slightly in that period of time. We have plans for it to grow a little bit more. We think we need to do a bit more work in that area, but it has not been negatively impacted by that.

Q64 Gavin Newlands: Karen, you and passenger groups have indicated that airlines should be obliged to carry out the reduced mobility reporting mechanism as well. Why do you think that is the case?



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Karen Dee: We support that. It is something that the CAA has been consulting on, and it goes back to my point earlier that passengers do not care who is responsible. Our view is that we can see the behaviours that are being driven by the framework that we have for airports, which is positive and drives the focus on that. We would like to see that extended through all of the passenger journey throughout the flight. We think that makes sense, and we would support it.

Q65 **Gavin Newlands:** Notwithstanding that, do you think there could be improvements to that mechanism as it stands at the moment?

Karen Dee: As airports, we feel that the framework we have is working well. I don't necessarily see any further changes to that part. As I say, we would like it in as similar as possible a framework for the airlines. It should be matched. We think the more that you make this information available to the public, the better, because that drives improved behaviours.

Q66 **Gavin Newlands:** Rob, do you think that the airlines should be under the same obligations?

Rob Griggs: In terms of the airline accessibility framework, we have responded to that. We are happy to work with the principle of the framework. There were some aspects that we had comments on. The initial proposal was for an equivalent framework to cover something like 20 airlines. There are over 100 airlines that come into the UK. We would say that the performance of the UK carriers that we represent is pretty good in this space, so you might be missing a trick if you have a framework that does not actually look at quite a few other airlines.

It gets into aspects where some things are outside an airline's control. Up front, aircraft are designed by the manufacturers, and sometimes that gives limitations. We did not want something where airlines might be unduly penalised disproportionately for things that they may not have control over, which could be the way that an aircraft cargo door opens. The principle is something we are very happy to work with. We understand why it is being done. We understand the role it has played with airports. It is something we are going to have to continue to talk to the CAA about as it is developed.

Q67 **Gavin Newlands:** Do you think that airlines are sufficiently knowledgeable or seized of the importance of this issue? We had Michael O'Leary here a few weeks ago. I paraphrase, but he said that airports were terrible at getting wheelchairs to aircraft when it is the airline's responsibility—in his case Ryanair—through their ground handling contract to get the wheelchair to the aircraft. Do you think that is an issue? Is the culture not the same in an airline as an airport in that respect?

Rob Griggs: In all the conversations we have had—we obviously represent UK carriers—it is taken hugely seriously. No airline wants to be seen as failing its disabled passengers and customers. Talking to our



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members, there are often dedicated teams. There is an increasing amount of focus. I know, for example, that fairly recently easyJet relaunched its assisted travel advisory group, and Lord Blunkett is chairing that. There is a huge amount of willingness and good work. In the last few months we have seen IATA, which represents international airlines, publishing a really good piece of new guidance on how to move mobility equipment safely. It gets into the weeds of how different wheelchairs work, the common issues around how they are transported, which bits might break off and which bits might be vulnerable, and how they should be safely stowed aboard different aircraft. There is a lot more work to do. That is somewhere there can still be incidents, for example, but I don't see any lack of desire by airlines to improve.

Q68 Gavin Newlands: You'll note I let you off and did not ask you if Michael was wrong when he gave evidence to the Committee.

I will move back to you, Anna, and the CAA enforcement powers. Strangely, when we talk about the CAA we are generally always talking about whether they need more powers for customers, or what have you. Many people have given evidence. We have heard from Transport for All. To quote them, "The CAA is very limited in its ability to hold all airlines to an equitable consumer standard." Do you think that is fair? Do you think you need more powers and, if so, what powers do you think you need?

Anna Bowles: We have been quite public about the fact that we would like more powers. Our powers currently stem from the Enterprise Act. We would particularly like more powers around information gathering. Those powers would enable us to get much more information directly from the airports and the airlines, particularly when things go wrong, so that we have visibility of where there are challenges and where we can look for trends.

We would like civil powers that potentially allow us to do things like impose fines when things go wrong, and we deem that necessary. We would always want to continue to have the positive engagement with industry that we currently have, but having those additional powers would be really helpful. I know that the Government announced in June that they were supportive of us getting those additional powers. We really welcomed that announcement. It requires primary legislation change. They have said that they would look to provide us with those powers when parliamentary time allows.

Q69 Gavin Newlands: At the moment, you are just relying on reputational behaviour, or the impact on reputation from airlines. Are some better than others in that respect?

Anna Bowles: The reputational impact is quite powerful. We also have undertakings that we can put in place, and have put in place in the past, which effectively require an airport or an airline to change their behaviour and do something. It is quite a time-consuming thing to put in place when we do that. In the event that it does not work, the next step would



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be to go to court, which is, again, also very time-consuming. We find the reputational side of things very effective. We have seen that in our airports framework.

To give you an example, when we produced our first report in 2015-16, there were 10 airports which were considered very good and 12 that were "Needs improvement" or "Poor". In our most recent report, granted that 2022 was a very challenging year, by the end of the year 25 airports were very good, and 16 of those airports managed to achieve very good for the whole year. There was just one that needed improvement. I think that demonstrates the impact that reputational regulation can have in making improvements over time.

Q70 Gavin Newlands: Rob, would you welcome the CAA having more civil powers and indeed the power to fine airlines?

Rob Griggs: Our priority in the space for accessibility is co-operation. We have a good relationship with the CAA. We are talking to the regulator about the airline framework. There is a workshop coming up with the DfT on these issues in a couple of weeks, where we can deep-dive into some of the problems.

On the powers themselves, I think we would want to see what those are. The CAA has a suite of powers in this space. There is the reputational and the ability to get commitments from carriers to improve in certain places as well as other parts. We think the powers are there. It is important that any additional powers are there for a reason, to address something that is currently not working. We want to see a little bit more about what that could be and how those would be used. Again, it is a conversation we are absolutely willing to have.

Q71 Gavin Newlands: Karen, there is overwhelming support from passenger groups for the CAA to have robust powers in this area. Would the AOA welcome that?

Karen Dee: Like Rob, we would be open-minded. If the CAA feels that there is something in the regulatory framework that does not currently work, we would consider that. But I go back to the fact that what we have seen is that reputation for our industry, for airports, is absolutely key and really drives behaviour.

One of the challenges always with having multiple players, whatever the powers, is that if you are looking at fines it becomes quite complicated as to who you fine and who was actually responsible. As a system what we want is for it to work. We would consider powers if they were necessary—we will have a look at that—but I think having the framework that requires the publishing of reputation immediately drives behaviours.

Gavin Newlands: On the level of fines, a £50,000 fine to Heathrow is somewhat different from a £50,000 fine to Newquay or somewhere like that. Thank you.



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Q72 **Chair:** Thank you, Gavin. I would like to conclude this session by returning to the issue of how personal mobility equipment is handled. If a wheelchair or other piece of equipment is damaged or lost, do airlines treat that as a luggage issue or an accessibility failure?

Rob Griggs: I would say that airlines treat it as an accessibility failure. There is absolute recognition that wheelchairs and mobility equipment are not luggage. They are people's independence. They are people's ability to carry on with their life on their holiday or travel. In the vast majority of cases, when mobility equipment is moved, it is done appropriately and safely and there are no issues. Issues happen, and we still see too many incidents when there may be damage to a wheelchair.

The Montreal convention applies. In theory, that caps the amount of compensation or damage that airlines would be obliged to pay to repair or fix a wheelchair. More often than not, when incidents happen, the value is less than the cap. I know that the Government are consulting on lifting that cap for domestic flights. In practice, airlines look at it on a case-by-case basis. They see what has happened and they often go beyond the Montreal convention and those sorts of caps. It is absolutely not the case that, in the event that something goes wrong, on those rare occasions, they say, "Very sorry, that's the limit." In our experience with our airlines, that is not how it is treated when an incident occurs. They look into it and often go further, if that is the fair thing to do.

Q73 **Chair:** Are incidences of loss or damage recorded separately from other luggage issues?

Rob Griggs: I believe so, but I would need to confirm. I am happy to come back to the Committee on that.

Q74 **Chair:** It would be helpful if you could supply that information and what the trends are. Is it getting better or worse compared to recent years?

Is there an issue with out-of-court settlements for damaged equipment obscuring the focus on this as an issue?

Rob Griggs: I would struggle to answer that. From speaking to our airlines, if something happens it is prioritised internally. It is not something that is dealt with necessarily by the person on the frontline. It will be escalated and dealt with. The circumstances of any kind of damage or incident will be investigated, and a solution will be found. No airline wants to fail their customers in that way. I cannot really comment on whether and how it might get escalated to the courts. I have not heard from our members of that being an issue in this space. It is very much on how they collectively reduce the incidence of its happening through better training and working with manufacturers to get the mobility equipment better able to travel safely. It is those sorts of things.

Q75 **Chair:** There is also a live debate about the extent to which wheelchairs and other bits of mobility equipment can be taken into the cabin with the passenger. I appreciate that it is a broad simplification because types of



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wheelchairs differ and sizes of aircraft differ, so there won't be a one-size-fits-all solution. From each of your perspectives, is there work going on to look at aircraft design, safety procedures and all the related points to allow more passengers to take their wheelchair or other equipment into the cabin with them?

Rob Griggs: The short answer is yes. As you say, it is highly complex because there are lots of different types of wheelchairs and lots of different types of mobility equipment. There are safety issues if there are, for example, certain sizes of batteries involved, but there is absolutely that desire. Often it means speaking to manufacturers as well, so it can be a long-lead situation. If and where we can enable people to go on to the aircraft in their chair and stay safely in their chair throughout the journey, that is definitely an aspirational place we want to be. It is not a widespread practice at the moment. The individual tends to have to be transferred, but it is absolutely a live issue.

Q76 **Chair:** It is something that the CAA is looking at?

Anna Bowles: We are very much aware that technology is being developed that could potentially allow individuals to stay in their wheelchair and for the standard seat to be adapted so that the wheelchair can slot into that position. I believe that is being looked at by the FAA in terms of the safety legislation around that.

It is a really exciting time, actually. There is the potential for this making a big difference for people who are wheelchair users. I suspect that it will not fit on the configuration of every aircraft that currently exists because they need a little bit more space, but it is certainly a brilliant step in the right direction to enable improvement in accessibility for wheelchair users.

Q77 **Chair:** Is it something that would require an international agreement?

Anna Bowles: I am not an expert on all the associated safety legislation, but I think it is about the Civil Aviation Authority in the region where the aircraft is registered. Certainly, the CAA has had conversations with the individuals involved in developing that technology. We would very much be willing and happy to work with them to try to enable that to become a reality for people.

Q78 **Chair:** It would be helpful if you could write to us afterwards with more information about the timescales for that work and when we might be able to see some definitive proposals.

Anna Bowles: We would be really happy to do that.

Chair: Lovely. Thank you. Again, I fear that the clock is against us. We still have to hear from our third panel. For now, thank you all again for your time and evidence this morning.